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37
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1936

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Contents

Notes

Rwanda: Crisis Spurs Reforms

7

~~Top Secret~~

19 November 1990

1945

~~Top Secret~~

Rwanda

President Habyarimana



A consensus seeker, Habyarimana, 53, maintains a delicate balance between contending regional leaders as well as between moderates and extremists in the government. He has inched toward political and economic reform in recent years by carefully building support and marginalizing his opponents. However, after setting broad policy goals, he relies on others to implement them, and subordinates who disagree with him sometimes obstruct his plans.

Habyarimana staged a bloodless coup in 1973 in response to widespread government corruption and rising ethnic tensions. His regime has been marked by racial tolerance and, until recently, fiscal responsibility. The President's longstanding popularity among the rural majority has declined as the economy has deteriorated

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~~Top Secret~~

19 November 1990

1946

~~Top Secret~~

RWANDA: Crisis Spurs Reforms

President Habyarimana last week introduced an economic reform package, announced that new national identity cards will exclude tribal affiliation, and launched a transition to multiparty democracy to shore up his beleaguered regime. Ethnic Tutsi rebels have rejected his moves and insist that he and his Hutu-dominated regime be removed. Skirmishes continue between the Army—still supported by France and Belgium—and small rebel groups along the Tanzanian and Ugandan borders. [redacted] France backs a regional settlement on refugees and has offered to finance a regional summit, a peacekeeping force, and the resettlement of all Rwandan refugees. Military delegations from Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the rebels are meeting in Zaire to create a joint force to patrol the Rwandan-Ugandan border. The UN High Commission for Refugees is organizing a regional summit on the refugee problem that may convene late this month in Tanzania. [redacted]

Comment: Habyarimana probably made his announcement in the hope of maintaining foreign, especially French, economic and political support. He also probably believes his reform initiatives will preempt rebel demands. The prospects of concessions to Tutsi interests and of economic austerity, however, risk jeopardizing his position at home, particularly with Hutu hardliners in the military, and may limit his maneuvering room in regional talks. [redacted]

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19 November 1990